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ABSTRACT

A strong vocational education program is essential for national economic recovery and growth. It is in the national interest to ensure that vocational education programs are of sufficient scope and quality to meet national skilled workforce requirements and alleviate the critical shortages of trained workers facing business, industry, and the Armed Forces. A national human resource policy should be designed to complement a larger policy of economic revitalization and new capital investment. Federal initiative and encouragement is needed not only to coordinate program planning at all government levels but also to ensure a close partnership between vocational education and the private sector. Without federal leadership and commitment another national priority, access to quality programs for the disadvantaged, handicapped, and other special populations, is also in jeopardy. The Federal Government should allocate more funds to support vocational education and training programs to (1) prepare entry workers, (2) provide skill updating, (3) retrain the unemployed, (4) assist those entering the labor market later in life, and (5) custom train individuals for employment with industries locating in the community. Skills and knowledge developed through these programs should be current, consistent with present and future labor market needs, complementary to national priority needs, and transportable. (YLB)

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NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL ON VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

POLICY STATEMENT

ON

THE NEED FOR A CONTINUING STRONG FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

ROLE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

FEBRUARY 18, 1982

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THE NEED FOR A CONTINUING STRONG FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP ROLE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

As the national debate continues on the division of responsibility for education, the place of education within the Federal establishment, and the level of education budgets, the National Advisory Council on Vocational Education makes the following statement in support of a continuing, strong Federal partnership role in vocational education.

A strong vocational education program is essential for National economic recovery, as well as economic growth. While education is primarily the responsibility of state and local jurisdictions, it is in the National interest to ensure that vocational education programs are of sufficient scope and quality to meet National skilled workforce requirements. Business, industry, and the Armed Forces face critical shortages of trained workers, which will increase in the future if we do not begin now to upgrade and expand vocational education programs and facilities.

Vocational education should be part of a National Human Resource Policy designed to complement a larger policy of economic revitalization and new capital investment. In addition to new capital, we also must invest in the skilled human capital to run the machinery for domestic consumption and military use. The development of human capital takes longer, and requires greater planning and foresight, but is equally important. Both are essential to future productivity. Without Federal initiative and encouragement, it is difficult for diversified local jurisdictions to plan programs which respond to long-term skill development needs of our economy.

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The training of a skilled labor force requires close partnership, not only among all levels of government, but between vocational education and the private sector. Neither can get along without the other. Vocational education requires the involvement and expertise of business and labor in the planning and design of its programs, in order to assure high quality and relevance. One means of providing that input and independent perspective is through the mandated State Advisory Councils, and their business and labor representatives. In turn, vocational education provides the pool of skilled and semi-skilled workers from which business and industry can draw to meet its increasing needs for new, technologically literate employees. Eighty percent of new jobs are in small businesses, many in high tech areas. Most of these smaller firms do not have the capacity or time to mount full-scale training programs. Most businesses which do train, do so on a job-specific basis, and prefer persons who have basic skills upon which to base the more specific training. By basic skills, most mean -- in addition to reading, writing, and computation -- basic employability skills and vocational skills.

Another National priority, access to quality programs, to provide those skills to the disadvantaged, the handicapped, and other special populations, is in jeopardy. Without Federal leadership and commitment, those with special needs are the most likely to be ignored or dropped. The often stated overmatch of ten State/local dollars fo one Federal dollar is a generalization which does not reflect the true situation. Actually, the match for the disadvantaged in 1979 was three dollars State/local to one dollar Federal; for the handicapped $2.50 to $1.00; for limited English-speaking, $4.50 to $1.00. Continued access to vocational education for these

special populations is an investment which will pay off many times over in increased tax revenues, reduced unemployment and welfare payments, and workers with pride in their skills who will serve as role models for future generations.

Historically, Federal involvement in vocational education has been in response to perceived National needs -- the move from an agricultural to an industrial economy, support of war efforts, post-war economic adjustment, and training to overcome foreign competition. The need has never been greater than it is now and will be over the next two decades, as we strive to strengthen our competitive stance and our defense posture in a new age of specialized technology.

As a matter of public policy, it is in the National interest that the Federal Government assume a more decisive role in allocating more, not fewer dollars to support vocational education and training programs to:

1. Prepare individuals with marketable skills for initial entrance into the labor market.
2. Provide individuals, once in the labor force, with opportunities to keep their knowledge and skills current.
3. Assist through retraining programs those who may become unemployed because of industrial lay-offs and plant closings or relocations.
4. Assist those who may enter the labor market later in life, including displaced homemakers.
5. Custom train individuals for specific employment with new industries that locate in the community.

The skills and knowledge developed through these programs should be current, should be consistent with the needs of the labor market now and in the future, should complement National priority needs, and should be transportable. The transport factor is especially important for the disadvantaged and

displaced workers who tend to be highly mobile as they leave depressed urban and rural areas in search of greater opportunity. A welder trained in Lexington, Kentucky, or Brooklyn, New York, should be able to function on the job in Houston, Texas, or Seattle, Washington.

We repeat the call made by this Council in 1975, by members appointed by Presidents Nixon and Ford, "to reclaim the skills and productivity of the American people," as a matter of National Policy. In that statement, the Council said:

> "America is rapidly losing the technical superiority that has been the base of our prosperity, and our proudest export. Our competitive position in world markets was built on the superb technical skills and productivity of our people. We are losing that edge. We must reclaim it."

We urge that the forthcoming debates focus on positive proposals to assist States in upgrading, modernizing, and expanding vocational programs to help achieve our Nation's economic goals. We urge Congress to continue the bi-partisan support which vocational education always has received, and to scrutinize carefully any proposals which would weaken vocational education itself, and as a viable partner in a National Human Resource Policy.

February, 1982